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AUTHOR Eggleton, Travis
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ABSTRACT

Discipline is a necessary ingredient for any successful school. Every teacher and school has a particular style and technique of discipline. This paper examines effective discipline strategies that help maintain school discipline. Classroom management, in school and out of school suspensions, alternative schooling, corporal punishment, and schoolwide discipline plans are some of the areas that the paper reviews. The paper finds that well disciplined schools do not happen by accident--a solid discipline plan requires cooperative ownership and responsibility of students, parents, and school personnel. It concludes that an effective discipline plan should inspire a climate in which all students take responsibility for their own behavior, treat each other with kindness, and learn the value of productive work and good citizenship. (Contains 13 references.) (NKA)

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Discipline in the Schools.

by Travis Eggleton

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Discipline in the Schools

Discipline is training which corrects, molds, or perfects, the mental faculties or moral character; obedience to authority or rules; punishment to correct poor behavior. Discipline is a necessary ingredient for any successful school. Every teacher and school has his or her own style and technique of discipline. In the following paper, varying effective discipline strategies that help maintain school discipline will be examined. Classroom management, in school and out of school suspensions, alternative schooling, corporal punishment, and schoolwide discipline plans are some of the areas that will be reviewed.

Many teachers see discipline as the number one problem facing American public schools today. Since teachers spend a majority of the time with students, they are usually on the front line of discipline and discipline problems. Discipline for a teacher is not easy. Since there is usually twenty-five students in a class, a teacher has twenty-five different variables to deal with. Each student will respond differently to the discipline techniques employed in the classroom. But a teacher has to think and act fast in order to manipulate their environment into one of learning and understanding.

Having a teacher that teaches at an optimum level is one of the best sources for classroom management. If students are learning at optimum level, student discipline problems should be few. Research has consistently shown that students behave better when they are provided with effective instruction (Killion, 1996). Establishing expectations and communicating them to all students early in the school year will provide better classroom climate throughout the year. Ignoring discipline problems will only cause things to get worse for the teacher. Effective teachers understand that discipline

should not be something that is used to crush a student, but rather to motivate that student to avoid negative behavior. Effective teachers do not let things get out of control and rarely do they get involved in power struggles and yelling matches with their students (Fuhr, 1993).

There are five certain basic classroom management procedures that top performing teachers routinely follow. They include the following. Telling students and parents what is expected of them and posting these expectations when class first begins. They communicate the consequences for not doing what is expected. They carry out the discipline in a fair and consistent matter. They treat all students with a positive attitude. Lastly, they are positive role models (Fuhr, 1993)

Combining the basics of effective classroom management with some humor goes a long way in reducing class discipline problems. Effective classroom managers provide everlasting positive memories for their students, not because they were out to win a popularity contest with the students, but because they earned respect by knowing when to act, how to act, and why (Fuhr, 1993). When the effective teacher feels they can no longer handle a discipline in the classroom, other steps must be taken to fix this problem. The next step usually rests in the lap of a higher authority, the principal.

The principal is the next one in line for a student displaying discipline problems in class. When a student is sent to the principal for a rule violation, the principal must decide what the next discipline step should be for that student. The principal has many options for the student. When a student has been in to see the principal on numerous occasions or has been sent to the principal for a serious infraction such as fighting, the usual response from the principal is to suspend the student. Which begs the question

does out of school or in school suspension do any good? The answer for misbehavior is no. Suspension and expulsion seem to be ineffective methods of dealing with misbehavior because they do not appear to be a determent for future misconduct (Bock, Tapscott, Savner, 1998). With 52% of suspended or expelled students having failing grades, the relationship between suspension and expulsion is immense. Suspending students also increased the likelihood that the suspended student would eventually dropout of school (Bock, Tapscott, Savner, 1998).

Most problem students see a suspension as vacation time. Suspending a student may simply accelerate the course of delinquency by giving a troubled youth a few extra days to hang with deviant peers (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Sometimes a suspension is necessary, but since many students see suspension as leisure time, administrators need to come up with an effective way to make a suspension something they do not want to do again. Joseph Feucht, an assistant principal in Westlake, Louisiana, has come up with what seems to be a successful suspension plan. When students are sent home from his school, the students are given one of many books from which to read. When the students return from being suspended, they are required to give an oral report to the assistant principal and take a test that measures comprehension of the material read. Students must average 80% proficiency or they are sent to an in-school suspension site to read the book again. In addition, they can be given appropriate content in all their respective disciplines that must be completed. For ease, one may have packets made up for each grade level and have all the work along with a checklist included. A suspension should not result in playtime; it should be punitive in an academic sense as well as productive (Feucht, 1998). Obviously it is better for everyone if students can be kept in school.

Another alternative to out of school suspension is in school suspension. In school suspension is where students are isolated in a room, work on regular assignments, and must adhere to a strict behavior code. This type of discipline satisfies three important criteria if executed correctly. It modifies student misbehavior. The assignments protect the overall learning environment by isolating disruptive students. In school suspension protects the community by keeping the offending students off the streets (Sheets, 1996).

Some forms of ISS have been found to be successful. But in order to be successful, an ISS program needs to have three components essential for its success. One is a foundation component. In this component, a philosophy needs to be developed that coincides with the schools overall educational policy. The program should include a mission statement that explains clearly what the programs does, where it wants to go, and how it is important to the school discipline policy. The ISS policy development should be a shared responsibility among administration, faculty, and students. All students assigned to ISS must abide bye the rules. The rules must be firm, fair, and consistently enforced and reflect the overall mission statement of the ISS policy (Sheets, 1996).

The next important step in a successful ISS program is the instructor. This person will make or break the ISS program. The person who is hired for this job should be a professional who will be trained and evaluated. The individual must keep accurate records, enforce policy, and perform many other duties. Adequate funding appropriate environment instructional materials, auxiliary staff, and cooperation from the facility are other important factors in a successful ISS program (Sheets, 1996).

The final component to a successful ISS program is evaluation. This must measure student behavior change over time and determine if the objectives of the program are

being accomplished. A committee should be formed and used to evaluate the program. The committee should make recommendations and determine if there is a need for changes in the program. For an ISS program to be fully effective, all three of these components must be in place. One component compliments the other (Sheets, 1996). For those students who cannot be kept in school for discipline reasons, and suspension is not an option, alternative schooling should be looked at.

Some students cannot be successful in regular classroom environment. Other academic options must be presented for those students. This is where the creation of alternative schooling came about. Now the majority of alternative school programs are designed to remove discipline students from the regular school, and hopefully rehabilitate them to rejoin the compliant majority (Johnston & Weatherill, 1998). So what is the aim of alternative education? Three types of alternative schools exist today and each one provides a certain need. Type 1 is those that educate, type 2 are those that discipline and type 3 are those that heal. The job here is to find the one that will best help a problem child.

Type 1 schools offer full-time multiyear education options for students of all kinds, including those seeking innovative or challenging curriculum, or dropouts wishing to earn their diplomas. Type 1 schools provide a full instructional program that students can earn the credits they need to graduate, and students chose to attend. Schools within schools, magnet schools and charter schools are a few examples of Raywids type 1 schools (Raywid et. al as cited in Gregg, 1999). Discipline distinguishes type 2 programs. They are designed to segregate, contain and reform disruptive students. Students typically do not choose to attend, but are placed in the program for specific time

periods. Curriculum is limited to a few basic courses or work supplied by their home school (Gregg, 1999). Type 3 programs provide short-term but therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional problems that created academic or behavioral barriers to learning. Type 3 programs usually offer counseling, access to social services, and academic remediation (Raywid et. al as cited in Gregg, 1999).

Do alternative schools for discipline problem students' work? Research shows that disciplinary programs reap no positive long-term gains and may even increase negative outcomes (Raywid et. al as cited in Gregg, 1999). Officials in Oklahoma studied data on the states alternative students- credits earned, classes failed, grade point average, absences, standardized test scores, and disciplinary referrals, and found that students in alternative education programs improved substantially. But students who were placed in disciplinary programs, their performance declined (Oklahoma Tech n.d.1 as cited in Gregg, 1999).

If classroom management techniques do not work, if in school or out of school suspension does not work, or if alternative schooling is not working, how about administering some corporal punishment. Will that work on a discipline problem child? What other courses of action can be taken?

Research indicates that corporal punishment is an ineffective technique to discipline students. Why is it ineffective? Research says that the use of corporal punishment always negatively affects self-concept (Hyman, 1996). Psychiatric News (as cited in Cryan, 1995) states that the psychological effects may be as harmful as the physical effects. These psychological effects may include increased anxiety and fear, feelings of helplessness and humiliation, stifled relationships with others, and aggression and

destruction at home and at school (Cryan, 1995) While corporal punishment may temporarily suppress negative behavior, it does not teach a new behavior (Bongiovanni as cited in Hyman, 1996). Schools with high rates of corporal punishment also have high rates of suspensions and are generally more punitive in all discipline responses than schools with low rates of corporal punishment (Rust & Kinnard as cited in Hyman, 1996). Corporal punishment in these schools is not used as a last resort, since studies show that it is too often the first line of punishment for nonviolent and minor behaviors (Hyman & Erdlen as cited in Hyman, 1996). If corporal punishment is not successful, then what? Researcher say a combination of reward, positive motivational techniques, and appropriate non-physical punishments would prevent most misbehavior (Hyman, 1996). If the paddles are to be thrown out, administrators, teachers, and community leaders must put their heads together as a whole and come up with another solution for discipline problems.

If properly administered, a school wide discipline policy can help reduce discipline problems. Many schools have now initiated zero tolerance policies to help reduce their discipline epidemic. Do zero tolerance policies usually work? The answer to that question seems to be no. The NCES has found that schools that use zero tolerance policies are still less safe than those without such a policy. Virtually no data suggests that zero tolerance policies reduce school violence and some data suggests that certain strategies such as strip searches or undercover agents in school may create emotional harm or encourage students to drop out. If we solely rely on zero tolerance strategies, we are accepting a model of schooling that implicitly teaches students that the preservation of order demands the suspension of individual rights. Zero tolerance strategies have

begun to turn our schools into supplemental law enforcement agencies and have demonstrated little in return (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). It is our job as teachers and administrators to keep as many students as possible in school. Zero tolerance policies do not do this, and it is paramount we come up with other schoolwide policies. It is essential to have a school wide discipline plan that is effective, so everyone in the school can help to foster a positive school climate.

So how does an effective school discipline policy come about? Well-disciplined schools do not happen by accident. A solid discipline plan requires cooperative ownership and responsibility of students, parents, and school personnel. Appropriate school discipline must be part of every program, curriculum, and practice. An effective discipline plan should inspire a climate in which all students take responsibility for their own behavior, treat each other with kindness and learn the value of productive work and good citizenship. Parents are an important part of the school discipline. Parents who are involved in their child's daily school life have a better understanding of what is acceptable and expected in the school climate (Williams, 1998). Regular communication with the home concerning attendance, homework and curricular and cocurricular activities help strengthen this relationship. After getting the parents involved, the school must have an organized plan for enforcing school policy (McNaughton & Johns, 1991). When student's misbehavior occurs, the symptoms as well as the causes are reviewed and addressed. All students need to be reminded of the school's rules and regulations and associated behavioral consequences both at the start of and throughout the school year. Consistency must rule and positive behavior should be rewarded (Heller, 1996). A well planned system of rewarding positive behavior by means of honor days, awards, positive

messages to parents, special recognition, prizes, trips, and special privileges is important to the success of the program (McNaughton & Johns, 1991).

Other key components for effective school wide discipline is the visibility of the principal and other administrators, they need to be seen regularly (McNaughton & Johns, 1991). Also, teamwork and mutual support must be established between the principal and the teachers to making a commitment to develop good discipline. Lastly, effective discipline requires ongoing, sustained evaluation (Williams, 1998). This requires that a school keeps working at management and disciplines much the same way as it would curriculum development (McNaughton & Johns, 1991). Strategies for reducing school discipline must be assessed continuously for their impact on school climate.

The need for discipline in school can not be underestimated. Administrators and teachers need to continuously open their minds to new and different techniques used to discipline student. Though suspension is necessary at times, it should be administrators' last resort. Effective and creative in-school and out of school suspensions need to be implemented to keep our troubled kids off the streets. Time and time again research has shown that effective teaching reduces classroom discipline problems. Teachers and administrators need to be fair, firm, and consistent when dealing with the students. An effective instructional teacher will not only help the students out academically, but will help the entire school environment with a positive and disciplined climate.

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